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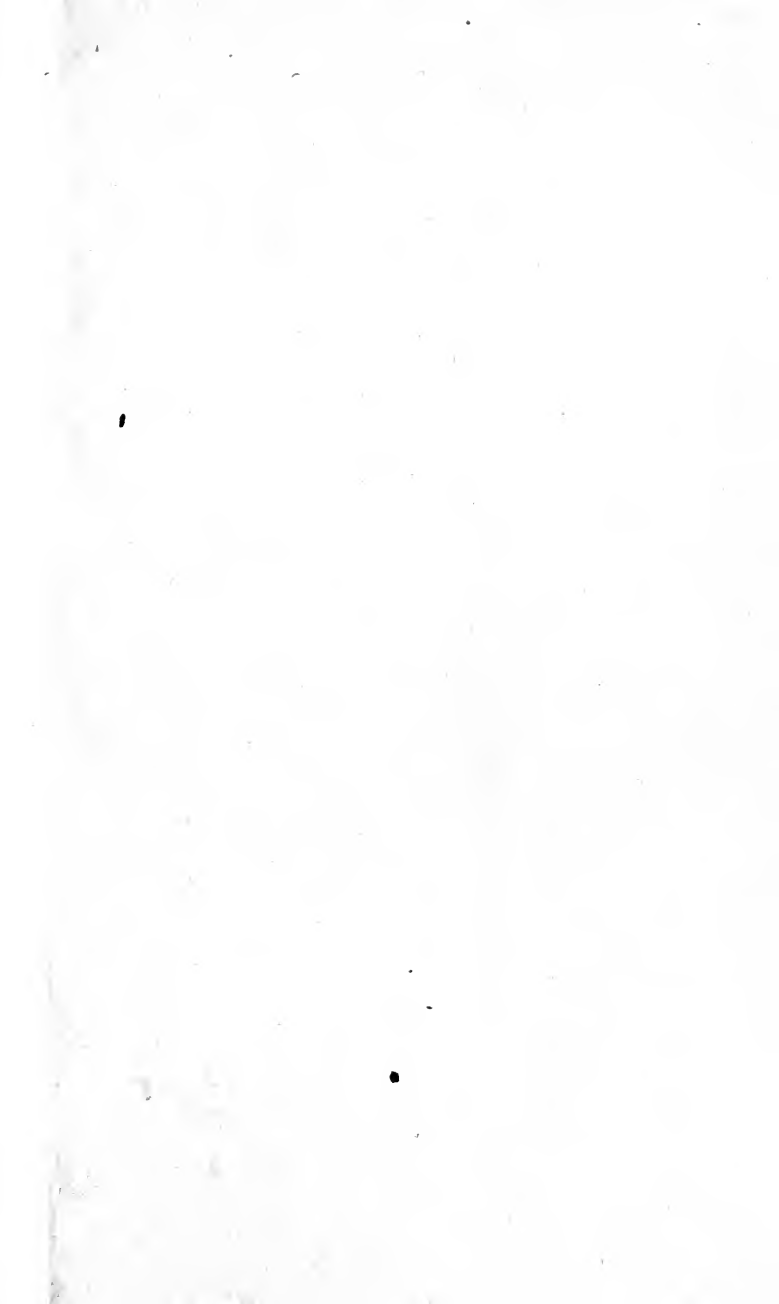
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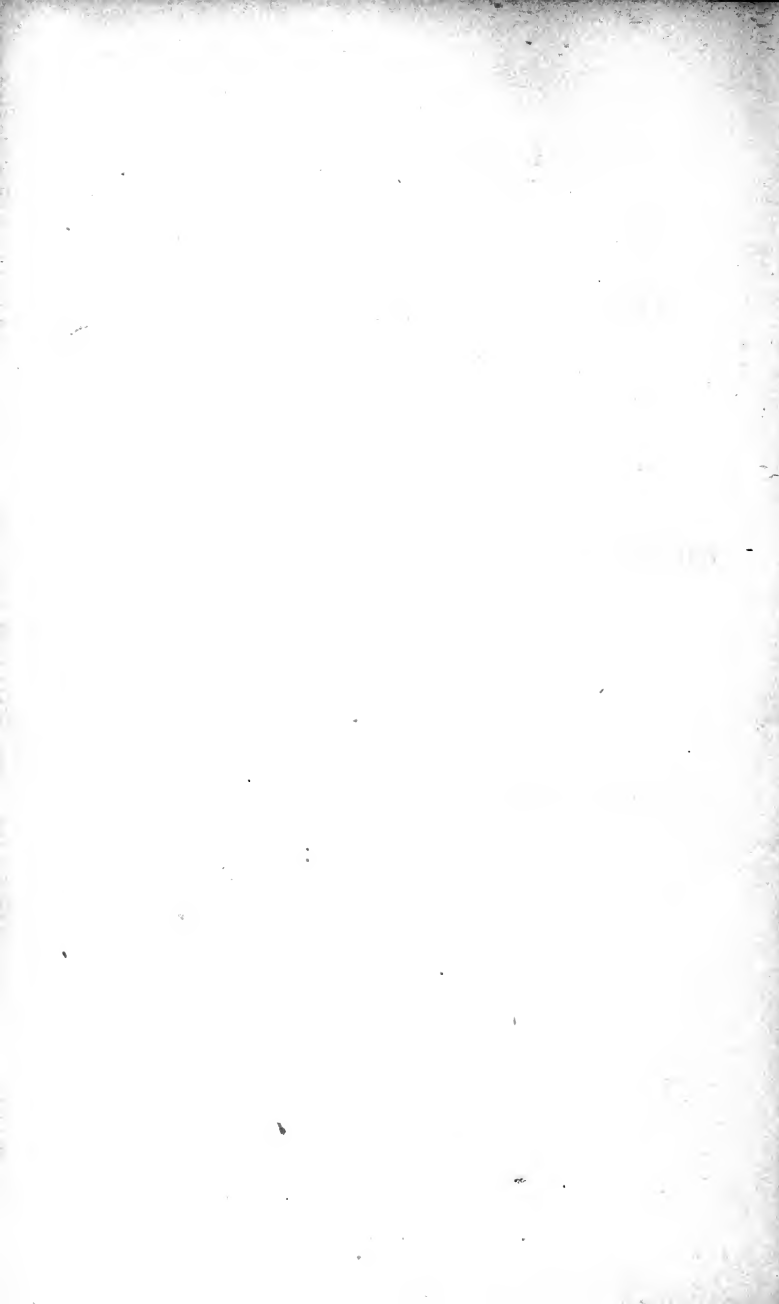
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A S T R Æ A :

THE BALANCE OF ILLUSIONS.

A POEM

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

PHI BETA KAPPA SOCIETY OF YALE COLLEGE,

AUGUST 14, 1850,

BY



OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE SOCIETY.



BOSTON:

TICKNOR, REED, AND FIELDS.

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A S T R Æ A .

WHAT secret charm, long whispering in mine ear,
Allures, attracts, compels and chains me here,
Where murmuring echoes call me to resign
Their sacred haunts to sweeter lips than mine ;
Where silent pathways pierce the solemn shade,
In whose still depths my feet have never strayed ;
Here, in the home where grateful children meet,
And I, half alien, take the stranger's seat,
Doubting, yet hoping that the gift I bear
May keep its bloom in this unwonted air ?
Hush, idle fancy, with thy needless art,
Speak from thy fountains, O my throbbing heart !

Say, shall I trust these trembling lips to tell
The fireside tale that memory knows so well?
How, in the days of Freedom's dread campaign,
A home-bred schoolboy left his village plain,
Slow faring southward, till his wearied feet
Pressed the worn threshold of this fair retreat;
How, with his comely face and gracious mien,
He joined the concourse of the classic green,
Nameless, unfriended, yet by nature blest
With the rich tokens that she loves the best;
The flowing locks, his youth's redundant crown,
Smoothed o'er a brow unfurrowed by a frown;
The untaught smile that speaks so passing plain
A world all hope, a past without a stain;
The clear-hued cheek, whose burning current glows
Crimson in action, carmine in repose;
Gifts such as purchase, with unminted gold,
Smiles from the young and blessings from the old.

Say, shall my hand with pious love restore
The faint, far pictures time beholds no more?
How the grave Senior, he whose later fame
Stamps on our laws his own undying name,

Saw from on high, with half paternal joy,
Some spark of promise in the studious boy,
And bade him enter, with benignant tone,
Those stately precincts which he called his own,
Where the fresh student and the youthful sage
Read by one taper from the common page ;
How the true comrade, whose maturer date
Graced the large honors of his ancient State,
Sought his young friendship, which through every
change

No time could weaken, no remove estrange ;
How the great MASTER, reverend, solemn, wise,
Fixed on his face those calm, majestic eyes,
Full of grave meaning, where a child might read
The Hebraist's patience and the Pilgrim's creed,
But warm with flashes of parental fire
That drew the stripling to his second sire ;
How kindness ripened, till the youth might dare
Take the low seat beside his sacred chair,
While the gray scholar, bending o'er the young,
Spelled the square types of Abraham's ancient
tongue,

Or with mild rapture stooped devoutly o'er
His small coarse leaf, alive with curious lore ;

Tales of grim judges, at whose awful beck
Flashed the broad blade across a royal neck,
Or learned dreams of Israel's long lost child
Found in the wanderer of the western wild.

Dear to his age were memories such as these,
Leaves of his June in life's autumnal breeze ;
Such were the tales that won my boyish ear,
Told in low tones that evening loves to hear.

Thus in the scene I pass so lightly o'er,
Trode for a moment, then beheld no more,
Strange shapes and dim, unseen by other eyes,
Through the dark portals of the past arise ;
I see no more the fair embracing throng,
I hear no echo to my saddened song,
No more I heed the kind or curious gaze,
The voice of blame, the rustling thrill of praise ;
Alone, alone, the awful past I tread
White with the marbles of the slumbering dead ;
One shadowy form my dreaming eyes behold
That leads my footsteps as it led of old,

One floating voice, amid the silence heard,
Breathes in my ear love's long unspoken word ; —
These are the scenes thy youthful eyes have known ;
My heart's warm pulses claim them as its own !
The sapling, compassed in thy fingers' clasp,
My arms scarce circle in their twice-told grasp,
Yet in each leaf of yon o'ershadowing tree
I read a legend that was traced by thee.
Year after year the living wave has beat
These smooth-worn channels with its trampling
feet,
Yet in each line that scores the grassy sod
I see the pathway where thy feet have trod.
Though from the scene that hears my faltering lay,
The few that loved thee long have passed away,
Thy sacred presence all the landscape fills,
Its groves and plains and adamantine hills !

Ye who have known the sudden tears that flow,—
Sad tears, yet sweet, the dews of twilight woe,—
When, led by chance, your wandering eye has crossed
Some poor memorial of the loved and lost,
Bear with my weakness as I look around
On the dear relics of this holy ground,

These bowery cloisters, shadowed and serene,
My dreams have pictured ere mine eyes have seen.

And oh, forgive me, if the flower I brought
Droops in my hand beside this burning thought ;
The hopes and fears that marked this destined hour,
The chill of doubt, the startled throb of power,
The flush of pride, the trembling glow of shame,
All fade away and leave my FATHER's name !

WINTER is past ; the heart of Nature warms
Beneath the wrecks of unresisted storms ;
Doubtful at first, suspected more than seen,
The southern slopes are fringed with tender green ;
On sheltered banks, beneath the dripping eaves,
Spring's earliest nurslings spread their glowing
leaves,

Bright with the hues from wider pictures won,
White, azure, golden, — drift, or sky, or sun ; —
The snowdrop, bearing on her patient breast
The frozen trophy torn from winter's crest ;
The violet, gazing on the arch of blue
Till her own iris wears its deepened hue ;
The spendthrift crocus, bursting through the mould
Naked and shivering with his cup of gold.
Swelled with new life, the darkening elm on high
Prints her thick buds against the spotted sky ;
On all her boughs the stately chestnut cleaves
The gummy shroud that wraps her embryo leaves ;
The housefly, stealing from his narrow grave,
Drugged with the opiate that November gave,

Beats with faint wing against the sunny pane,
Or crawls, tenacious, o'er its lucid plain;
From shaded chinks of lichen-crustcd walls,
In languid curves, the gliding serpent crawls;
The bog's green harper, thawing from his sleep,
Twangs a hoarse note and tries a shortened leap;
On floating rails that face the softening noons
The still shy turtles range their dark platoons,
Or toiling, aimless, o'er the mellowing fields,
Trail through the grass their tessellated shields.

At last young April, ever frail and fair,
Wooed by her playmate with the golden hair,
Chased to the margin of receding floods
O'er the soft meadows starred with opening buds,
In tears and blushes sighs herself away,
And hides her cheek beneath the flowers of May.

Then the proud tulip lights her beacon blaze,
Her clustering curls the hyacinth displays,
O'er her tall blades the crested fleur-de-lis,
Like blue-eyed Pallas, towers erect and free;

With yellower flames the lengthened sunshine
glows,
And love lays bare the passion-breathing rose ;
Queen of the lake, along its reedy verge
The rival lily hastens to emerge,
Her snowy shoulders glistening as she strips
Till morn is sultan of her parted lips.

Then bursts the song from every leafy glade,
The yielding season's bridal serenade ;
Then flash the wings returning summer calls
Through the deep arches of her forest halls ;
The bluebird breathing from his azure plumes
The fragrance borrowed where the myrtle blooms ;
The thrush, poor wanderer, dropping meekly down,
Clad in his remnant of autumnal brown ;
The oriole, drifting like a flake of fire
Rent by the whirlwind from a blazing spire.
The robin, jerking his spasmodic throat,
Repeats, *staccato*, his peremptory note ;
The crackbrained bobolink courts his crazy mate,
Poised on a bulrush tipsy with his weight ;
Nay, in his cage the lone canary sings,
Feels the soft air and spreads his idle wings ; —

Why dream I here within these caging walls,
Deaf to her voice while blooming Nature calls ;
Peering and gazing with insatiate looks
Through blinding lenses, or in wearying books ?
Off, gloomy spectres of the shrivelled past,
Fly with the leaves that filled the autumn blast !
Ye imps of Science, whose relentless chains
Lock the warm tides within these living veins,
Close your dim cavern, while its captive strays
Dazzled and giddy in the morning's blaze !

What life is this, that spreads in sudden birth
Its plumes of light around a new-born earth ?
Is this the sun that brought the unwelcome day,
Pallid and glimmering with his lifeless ray,
Or through the sash that bars yon narrow cage
Slanted, intrusive, on the opened page ?
Is this soft breath the same complaining gale
That filled my slumbers with its murmuring wail ?
Is this green mantle of elastic sod
The same brown desert with its frozen clod,
Where the last ridges of the dingy snow
Lie till the windflower blooms unstained below ?

Thus to my heart its wonted tides return
When sullen Winter breaks his crystal urn,
And o'er the turf in wild profusion showers
Its dewy leaflets and ambrosial flowers.
In vacant rapture for a while I range
Through the wide scene of universal change,
Till, as the statue in its nerves of stone
Felt the new senses wakening one by one,
Each long closed inlet finds its destined ray
Through the dark curtain Spring has rent away.
I crush the buds the clustering lilacs bear ;
The same sweet fragrance that I loved is there ;
The same fresh hues each opening disk reveals ;
Soft as of old each silken petal feels ;
The birch's rind its flavor still retains,
Its boughs still ringing with the self-same strains ;
Above, around, rekindling Nature claims
Her glorious altars wreathed in living flames ;
Undimmed, unshadowed, far as morning shines
Feeds with fresh incense her eternal shrines.
Lost in her arms, her burning life I share,
Breathe the wild freedom of her perfumed air,

From Heaven's fair face the long-drawn shadows
roll,
And all its sunshine floods my opening soul!

Yet in the darksome crypt I left so late,
Whose only altar is its rusted grate, —
Sepulchral, rayless, joyless as it seems,
Shamed by the glare of May's refulgent beams, —
While the dim seasons dragged their shrouded train,
Its paler splendors were not quite in vain.
From these dull bars the cheerful firelight's glow
Streamed through the casement o'er the spectral
snow ;

Here, while the night wind wreaked its frantic will
On the loose ocean and the rock-bound hill,
Rent the cracked topsail from its quivering yard,
And rived the oak a thousand storms had scarred,
Fenced by these walls the peaceful taper shone,
Nor felt a breath to swerve its trembling cone.

Not all unblest the mild interior scene
When the red curtain spread its folded screen ;
O'er some light task the lonely hours were past,
And the long evening only flew too fast ;

Or the wide chair its leathern arms would lend
In genial welcome to some easy friend,
Stretched on its bosom with relaxing nerves,
Slow moulding, plastic, to its hollow curves;
Perchance indulging, if of generous creed,
In brave Sir Walter's dream-compelling weed.
Or, happier still, the evening hour would bring
To the round table its expected ring,
And while the punch bowl's sounding depths were
stirred, —

Its silver cherubs smiling as they heard, —
O'er caution's head the blinding hood was flung,
And friendship loosed the jesses of the tongue.

Such the warm life this dim retreat has known,
Not quite deserted when its guests were flown;
Nay, filled with friends, an unobtrusive set,
Guiltless of calls and cards and etiquette,
Ready to answer, never known to ask,
Claiming no service, prompt for every task.

On those dark shelves no housewife tool profanes,
O'er his mute files the monarch folio reigns;

A mingled race, the wreck of chance and time,
That talk all tongues and breathe of every clime ;
Each knows his place, and each may claim his part
In some quaint corner of his master's heart.
This old Decretal, won from Kloss's hoards,
Thick-leafed, brass-cornered, ribbed with oaken
boards,
Stands the gray patriarch of the graver rows,
Its fourth ripe century narrowing to its close ;
Not daily conned, but glorious still to view
With glistening letters wrought in red and blue.
There towers Stagira's all-embracing sage,
The Aldine anchor on his opening page ;
There sleep the births of Plato's heavenly mind
In yon dark tome by jealous clasps confined,
"Olim e libris" — (dare I call it mine ?)
Of Yale's great Head and Killingworth's divine !
In those square sheets the songs of Maro fill
The silvery types of smooth-leafed Baskerville ;
High over all, in close compact array,
Their classic wealth the Elzevirs display.
In lower regions of the sacred space
Range the dense volumes of a humbler race ;

There grim chirurgeons all their mysteries teach
In spectral pictures, or in crabbed speech ;
Harvey and Haller, fresh from Nature's page,
Shoulder the dreamers of an earlier age,
Lully and Geber, and the learned crew
That loved to talk of all they could not do.
Why count the rest, — those names of later days
That many love and all agree to praise, —
Or point the titles where a glance may read
The dangerous lines of party or of creed ?
Too well, perchance, the chosen list would show
What few may care and none can claim to know.
Each has his features, whose exterior seal
A brush may copy, or a sunbeam steal ;
Go to his study, — on the nearest shelf
Stands the mosaic portrait of himself.

What though for months the tranquil dust de-
scends,
Whitening the heads of these mine ancient friends,
While the damp offspring of the modern press
Flaunts on my table with its pictured dress ;

Not less I love each dull familiar face,
Nor less should miss it from the appointed place ;
I snatch the book along whose burning leaves
His scarlet web our wild romancer weaves,
Yet, while proud Hester's fiery pangs I share,
My old MAGNALIA must be standing *there* !

See, while I speak, my fireside joys return,
The lamp rekindles and the ashes burn,
The dream of summer fades before their ray,
As in red firelight sunshine dies away.

A two-fold picture ; ere the first was gone,
The deepening outline of the next was drawn,
And wavering fancy hardly dares to choose
The first or last of her dissolving views.

No Delphic sage is wanted to divine
The shape of Truth beneath my gauzy line ;
Yet there are truths, — like schoolmates, once well
known,
But half remembered, not enough to own, —
That lost from sight in life's bewildering train,
May be, like strangers, introduced again,

Dressed in new feathers, as from time to time
May please our friends, the milliners of rhyme.

Trust not, it says, the momentary hue
Whose false complexion paints the present view ;
Red, yellow, violet stain the rainbow's light,
The prism dissolves, and all again is white.

When o'er the street the morning peal is flung
From yon tall belfry with the brazen tongue,
Its wide vibrations, wafted by the gale,
To each far listener tell a different tale.

The sexton, stooping to the quivering floor
Till the great caldron spills its brassy roar,
Whirls the hot axle, counting, one by one,
Each dull concussion, till his task is done.

Toil's patient daughter, when the welcome note
Clangs through the silence from the steeple's throat,
Streams, a white unit, to the checkered street,
Demure, but guessing whom she soon shall meet ;
The bell, responsive to her secret flame,
With every note repeats her lover's name.

The lover, tenant of the neighboring lane,
Sighing, and fearing lest he sigh in vain,

Hears the stern accents, as they come and go,
Their only burden one despairing No!

Ocean's rough child, whom many a shore has
known

Ere homeward breezes swept him to his own,
Starts at the echo, as it circles round,
A thousand memories kindling with the sound;
The early favorite's unforgotten charms,
Whose blue initials stain his tawny arms;
His first farewell, the flapping canvas spread,
The seaward streamers crackling o'er his head,
His kind, pale mother, not ashamed to weep
Her first-born's bridal with the haggard deep,
While the brave father stood with tearless eye,
Smiling and choking with his last good bye.

'T is but a wave, whose spreading circle beats,
With the same impulse, every nerve it meets,
Yet who shall count the varied shapes that ride
On the round surge of that aërial tide!

O child of earth! If floating sounds like these
Steal from thyself their power to wound or please,

If here or there thy changing will inclines,
As the bright zodiac shifts its rolling signs,
Look at thy heart, and when its depths are known
Then try thy brother's, judging by thine own,
But keep thy wisdom to the narrower range,
While its own standards are the sport of change,
Nor ask mankind to tremble, and obey
The passing breath that holds thy passion's sway.

But how, alas! among our eager race,
Shall smiling candor show her girlish face?
What place is secret to the meddling crew,
Whose trade is settling what we all shall do?
What verdict sacred from the busy fools,
That sell the jargon of their outlaw schools?
What pulpit certain to be never vexed
With libels sanctioned by a holy text?
Where, O my country, is the spot that yields
The freedom fought for on a hundred fields?

Not one strong tyrant holds the servile chain,
Where all may vote and each may hope to reign;
One sturdy cord a single limb may bind,
And leave the captive only half confined,

But the free spirit finds its legs and wings
Tied with unnumbered Lilliputian strings,
Which, like the spider's undiscovered fold,
In countless meshes round the prisoner rolled,
With silken pressure that he scarce can feel,
Clamp every fibre as in bands of steel !

Hard is the task to point in civil phrase
One's own dear people's foolish works or ways ;
Wo to the friend that marks a touchy fault,
Himself obnoxious to the world's assault !
Think what an earthquake is a nation's hiss,
That takes its circuit through a land like this ;
Count with the census, would you be precise,
From sea to sea, from oranges to ice ;
A thousand myriads are its virile lungs,
A thousand myriads its contralto tongues !

And oh, remember the indignant press ;
Honey is bitter to its fond caress,
But the black venom that its hate lets fall
Would shame to sweetness the hyena's gall !

Briefly and gently let the task be tried
To touch some frailties on their tender side ;

Not to dilate on each imagined wrong,
And spoil at once our temper and our song,
But once or twice a passing gleam to throw
On some rank failings ripe enough to show,
Patterns of others, — made of common stuff, —
The world will furnish parallels enough, —
Such as bewilder their contracted view,
Who make one pupil do the work of two ;
Who following Nature, where her tracks divide,
Drive all their passions on the narrower side,
And pour the phials of their virtuous wrath
On half mankind that take the wider path.

Nature is liberal to her inmost soul,
She loves alike the tropic and the pole,
The storm's wild anthem, and the sunshine's calm,
The arctic fungus, and the desert palm ;
Loves them alike, and wills that each maintain
Its destined share of her divided reign ;
No creeping moss refuse her crystal gem,
No soaring pine her cloudy diadem !

Alas ! her children, borrowing but in part
The flowing pulses of her generous heart,

Shame their kind mother with eternal strife
At all the crossings of their mingled life ;
Each age, each people finds its ready shifts
To quarrel stoutly o'er her choicest gifts.

History can tell of early ages dim,
When man's chief glory was in strength of limb ;
Then the best patriot gave the hardest knocks,
The height of virtue was to fell an ox ;
Ill fared the babe of questionable mould,
Whom its stern father happened to behold ;
In vain the mother with her ample vest
Hid the poor nursling on her throbbing breast ;
No tears could save him from the kitten's fate,
To live an insult to the warlike state.

This weakness passed, and nations owned once
more,
Man was still human, measuring five feet four,
The anti-cripples ceased to domineer,
And owned Napoleon worth a grenadier.

In these mild times the ancient bully's sport
Would lead its hero to a well known court ;

Olympian athletes, though the pride of Greece
Must face the Justice if they broke the peace,
And valor find some inconvenient checks,
If strolling Theseus met Policeman X.

Perhaps too far in these considerate days
Has patience carried her submissive ways ;
Wisdom has taught us to be calm and meek,
To take one blow and turn the other cheek ;
It is not written what a man shall do,
If the rude caitiff strike the other too !

Land of our fathers, in thine hour of need
God help thee, guarded by the passive creed !
As the lone pilgrim trusts to beads and cowl,
When through the forest rings the gray wolf's howl ;
As the deep galleon trusts her gilded prow
When the black corsair slants athwart her bow ;
As the poor pheasant, with his peaceful mien,
Trusts to his feathers, shining golden-green,
When the dark plumage with the crimson beak
Has rustled shadowy from its splintered peak ;
So trust thy friends, whose idle tongues would charm
The lifted sabre from thy foeman's arm,

Thy torches ready for the answering peal
From bellowing fort and thunder-freighted keel !

Yet when thy champion's stormy task is done,
The frigate silenced and the fortress won,
When toil-worn valor claims his laurel wreath,
His reeking cutlass slumbering in its sheath,
The fierce declaimer shall be heard once more,
Whose twang was smothered by the conflict's roar ;
Heroes shall fall that strode unharmed away
Through the red heaps of many a doubtful day,
Hacked in his sermons, riddled in his prayers,
The broadcloth slashing what the broadsword spares !

Untaught by trial, ignorance might suppose
That all our fighting must be done with blows ;
Alas ! not so ; between the lips and brain
A dread artillery masks its loaded train ;
The smooth portcullis of the smiling face
Veils the grim battery with deceptive grace,
But in the flashes of its opened fire,
Truth, Honor, Justice, Peace and Love expire.

Yon whey-faced brother, who delights to wear
A weedy flux of ill-conditioned hair,
Seems of the sort that in a crowded place
One elbows freely into smallest space ;
A timid creature, lax of knee and hip,
Whom small disturbance whitens round the lip ;
One of those harmless spectacled machines,
Ignored by waiters when they call for greens,
Whom schoolboys question if their walk transcends
The last advices of maternal friends,
Whom John, obedient to his master's sign,
Conducts, laborious, up to ninety-nine,
While Peter, glistening with luxurious scorn,
Husks his white ivories like an ear of corn ;
Dark in the brow and bilious in the check,
Whose yellowish linen flowers but once a week,
Conspicuous, annual, in their threadbare suits,
And the laced high-lows which they call their boots.
Well may'st thou *shun* that dingy front severe,
But him, O stranger, him thou canst not *fear* !

Be slow to judge, and slower to despise,
Man of broad shoulders and heroic size !

The tiger, writhing from the boa's rings,
Drops at the fountain where the cobra stings.
In that lean phantom, whose extended glove
Points to the text of universal love,
Behold the master that can tame thee down
To crouch, the vassal of his Sunday frown;
His velvet throat against thy corded wrist,
His loosened tongue against thy doubled fist !

The MORAL BULLY, though he never swears,
Nor kicks intruders down his entry stairs,
Though meekness plants his backward sloping hat,
And non-resistance ties his white cravat,
Though his black broadcloth glories to be seen
In the same plight with Shylock's gaberdine,
Hugs the same passion to his narrow breast,
That heaves the cuirass on the trooper's chest,
Hears the same hell-hounds yelling in his rear,
That chase from port the maddened buccaneer,
Feels the same comfort while his acrid words
Turn the sweet milk of kindness into curds,
Or with grim logic prove, beyond debate,
That all we love is worthiest of our hate,

As the scarred ruffian of the pirate's deck,
When his long swivel rakes the staggering wreck!

Heaven keep us all! Is every rascal clown,
Whose arm is stronger, free to knock us down?
Has every scarecrow, whose cachectic soul
Seems fresh from Bedlam, airing on parole,
Who, though he carries but a doubtful trace
Of angel visits on his hungry face,
From lack of marrow or the coins to pay,
Has dodged some vices in a shabby way,
The right to stick us with his cut-throat terms,
And bait his homilies with his brother worms?

If generous fortune give me leave to choose
My saucy neighbors barefoot or in shoes,
I leave the hero blustering while he dares
On platforms furnished with posterior stairs,
Till prudence drives him to his "earnest" legs
With large bequest of disappointed eggs,
And take the brawler whose unstudied dress
Becomes him better, and protects him less;
Give me the bullying of the scoundrel crew,
If swaggering virtue wont insult me too!

Come, let us breathe ; a something not divine
Has mingled, bitter, with the flowing line.
Pause for a moment while our soul forgets
The noisy tribe in panta-loons or -lets ;
Nor pass, ungrateful, by the debt we owe
To those who teach us half of all we know,
Not in rude license, or unchristian scorn,
But hoping, loving, pitying, while they warn !

Sweep out the pieces ! Round a careless room
The feather duster follows up the broom ;
If the last target took a round of grape
To knock its beauty something out of shape,
The next asks only, if the listener please,
A schoolboy's blowpipe and a gill of peas.

This creeping object, caught upon the brink
Of an old teacup, filled with muddy ink,
Lives on a leaf that buds from time to time
In certain districts of a temperate clime.
O'er this he toils in silent corners snug,
And leaves a track behind him, like a slug ;
The leaves he stains a humbler tribe devours,
Thrown off in monthly or in weekly showers ;

Himself kept savage on a starving fare,
Of such exuviæ as his friends can spare.

Let the bug drop, and view him if we can
In his true aspect as a *quasi* man.

The little wretch, whose terebrating powers
Would bore a Paixhan in a dozen hours,
Is called a critic by the heavy friends
That help to pay his minus dividends.

The pseudo-critic-editorial race
Owns no allegiance but the law of place ;
Each to his region sticks through thick and thin,
Stiff as a beetle spiked upon a pin.
Plant him in Boston, and his sheet he fills
With all the slipslop of his threefold hills,
Talks as if Nature kept her choicest smiles
Within his radius of a dozen miles,
And nations waited till his next Review
Had made it plain what Providence must do.
Would you believe him, water is not damp
Except in buckets with the Hingham stamp,
And Heaven should build the walls of Paradise
Of Quincy granite lined with Wenham ice.

But Hudson's banks, with more congenial skies
Swell the small creature to alarming size ;
A gayer pattern wraps his flowery chest,
A sham more brilliant sparkles on his breast,
An eyeglass, hanging from a gilded chain,
Taps the white leg that tips his rakish cane ;
Strings of new names, the glories of the age,
Hang up to dry on his exterior page,
Titanic pygmies, shining lights obscure,
His favored sheets have managed to secure,
Whose wide renown beyond their own abode
Extends for miles along the Harlaem road ;
New radiance lights his patronizing smile,
New airs distinguish his patrician style,
New sounds are mingled with his fatal hiss,
Oftenest, "*provincial*" and "*metropolis*."

He cry "*provincial*," with imperious brow !
The half-bred rogue, that groomed his mother's cow !
Fed on coarse tubers and Æolian beans
Till clownish manhood crept among his teens,
When, after washing and unheard of pains
To lard with phrases his refractory brains,

A third-rate college licked him to the shape,
Not of the scholar, but the scholar's ape !

God bless Manhattan ! Let her fairly claim,
With all the honors due her ancient name,
Worth, wisdom, wealth, abounding and to spare,
Rags, riots, rogues, at least her honest share ;
But not presume, because, by sad mischance,
The mobs of Paris wring the neck of France,
Fortune has ordered she shall turn the poise
Of thirty Empires with her Bowery boys !

The poorest hamlet on the mountain's side
Looks on her glories with a sister's pride ;
When the first babes her fruitful ship-yards wean,
Play round the breasts of Ocean's conquered queen,
The shout of millions, borne on every breeze,
Sweeps with EXCELSIOR o'er the enfranchised seas !

Yet not too rashly let her think to bind
Beneath her circlet all the nation's mind ;
Our star-crowned mother, whose informing soul
Clings to no fragment, but pervades the whole,

Views with a smile the clerk of Maiden Lane,
Who takes her ventral ganglion for her brain !
No fables tell us of Minervas born
From bags of cotton or from sacks of corn ;
The halls of Leyden Science used to cram,
While dulness snored in purse-proud Amsterdam !

But those old burghers had a foggy clime,
And better luck may come the second time ;
What though some churls of doubtful sense declare
That poison lurks in her commercial air,
Her buds of genius dying premature,
From some malaria draining cannot cure ;
Nay, that so dangerous is her golden soil,
Whate'er she borrows, she contrives to spoil ;
That drooping minstrels in a few brief years
Lose their sweet voice, the gift of other spheres ;
That wafted singing from their native shore,
They touch the Battery, and are heard no more ;—
By those twinned waves that wear the varied gleams
Beryl or sapphire mingles in their streams,
Till the fair sisters o'er her yellow sands,
Clasping their soft and snowy ruffled hands,

Lay on her footstool with their silver keys
Strength from the mountains, freedom from the
seas,—

Some future day may see her rise sublime
Above her counters,— only give her time !

When our first Soldiers' swords of honor gild
The stately mansions that her tradesmen build ;
When our first Statesmen take the Broadway track,
Our first Historians following at their back ;
When our first Painters, dying, leave behind
On her proud walls the shadows of their mind ;
When our first Poets flock from farthest scenes
To take in hand her pictured Magazines ;
When our first Scholars are content to dwell
Where their own printers teach them how to spell ;
When world-known Science crowds toward her
gates,
Then shall the children of our hundred States
Hail her a true METROPOLIS of men,
The nation's centre. Then, and not till then !

The song is failing. Yonder clanging tower
Shakes in its cup the more than brimming hour ;

The full-length gallery which the fates deny,
A colored Moral briefly must supply.

No life worth naming ever comes to good
If always nourished on the self-same food ;
The creeping mite may live so if he please,
And feed on Stilton till he turns to cheese,
But cool Magendie proves beyond a doubt,
If mammals try it, that their eyes drop out.

No reasoning natures find it safe to feed
For their sole diet on a single creed ;
It chills their hearts, alas ! it fills their lungs,
And spoils their eyeballs while it spares their tongues.

When the first larvæ on the elm are seen,
The crawling wretches, like its leaves, are green ;
Ere chill October shakes the latest down,
They, like the foliage, change their tint to brown ;
On the blue flower a bluer flower you spy,
You stretch to pluck it — 't is a butterfly ;
The flattened tree-toads so resemble bark,
They're hard to find as Ethiops in the dark ;

The woodcock, stiffening to fictitious mud,
Cheats the young sportsman thirsting for his blood.
So by long living on a single lie,
Nay, on one truth, will creatures get its dye ;
Red, yellow, green, they take their subject's hue, —
Except when squabbling turns them black and blue !

The song is passing. Let its meaning rise
To loftier notes before its echo dies,
Nor leave, ungracious, in its parting train
A trivial flourish or discordant strain.

These lines may teach, rough-spoken though
they be,
Thy gentle creed, divinest Charity !
Truth is at heart not always as she seems,
Judged by our sleeping or our waking dreams.

We trust and doubt, we question and believe,
From life's dark threads a trembling faith to weave,
Frail as the web that misty night has spun,
Whose dew-gemmed awnings glitter in the sun.
Though Sovereign Wisdom, at his creatures' call,
Has taught us much, he has not taught us all ;

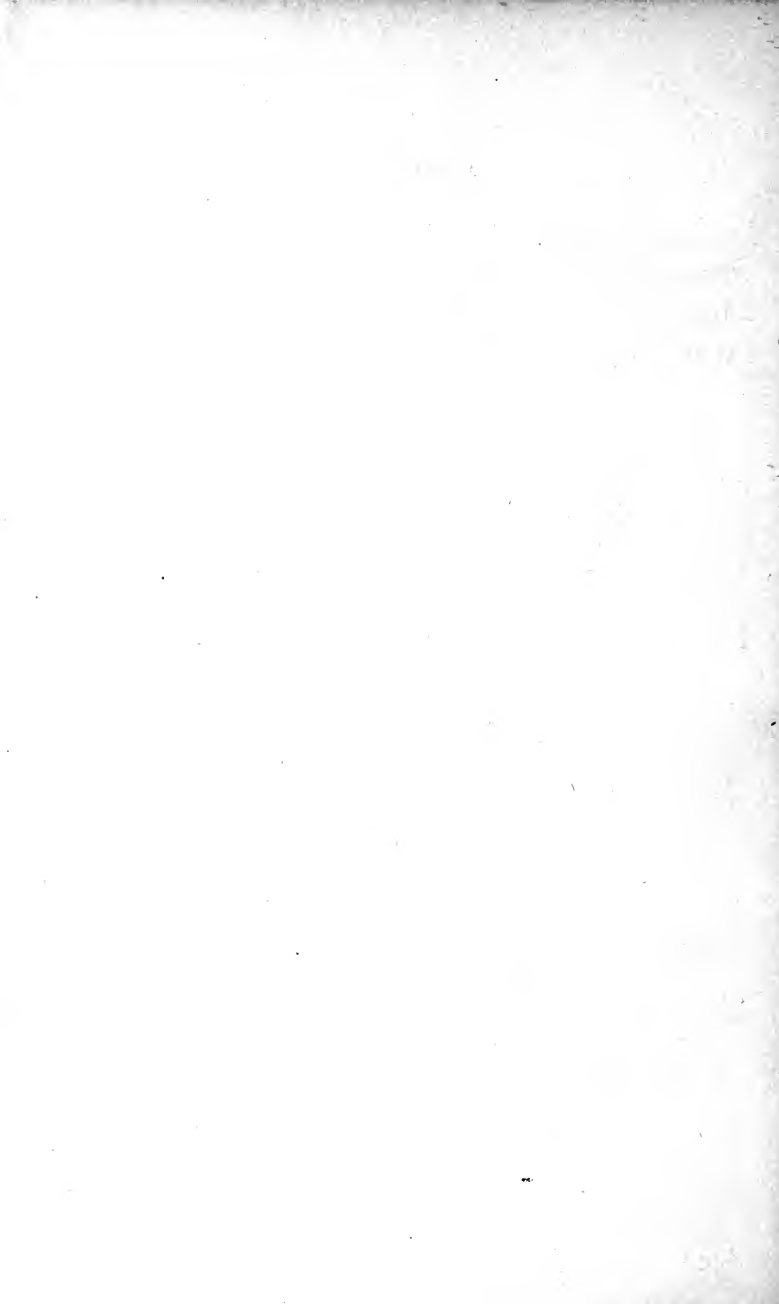
When Sinai's summit was Jehovah's throne,
The chosen Prophet knew his voice alone ;
When Pilate's hall that awful question heard,
The Heavenly Captive answered not a word.

Eternal Truth ! Beyond our hopes and fears
Sweep the vast orbits of thy myriad spheres !
From age to age, while History carves sublime
On her waste rock the flaming curves of time,
How the wild swayings of our planet show
That worlds unseen surround the world we know !

The song is hushed. Another moment parts
This breathing zone, this belt of living hearts ;
Ah, think not thus the parting moment ends
The soul's embrace of new discovered friends.

Sleep on my heart, thou long expected hour,
Time's new-born daughter, with thine infant dower,
One sad, sweet look from those expiring charms
The clasping centuries strangle in their arms,
Dreams of old halls, and shadowy arches green,
And kindly faces loved as soon as seen !

Sleep, till the fires of manhood fade away,
The sprinkled locks have saddened into gray,
And age, oblivious, blends thy memories old
With hoary legends that his sire has told !





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—*Transcriber.*